

Dartmouth Alumni and Students for Honduras  
Newsletter May 2014

In March, five members of DASH traveled to the small village of El Rosario, Honduras to complete the sixth successful year of the “Fuerza” youth leadership program. Our team members were Juliana Ortego '13, Christine Averill '13, Mike Harris '72, Keelin Stronski '16, and Ian Speers '17. We spent nine days in the country, and we each worked on various projects with local community members. This year’s Fuerza program was one of our most successful yet! We worked with a diverse group of students, some of whom returned for their sixth consecutive year at the camp, and others who participated in the program for the first time. We experimented with a new program structure, in which students of mixed experience levels in La Fuerza were placed in three different groups, which were led individually by Juliana, Christine, and Keelin. Students who had shown exemplary leadership in their previous years of Fuerza participation were designated “captains” of each group.

As is traditional in the program, we reinforced skills in public speaking, interviewing, and formal writing, and also conducted a number of exciting construction projects. This special construction element of La Fuerza, designed to stimulate a spirit of volunteerism and an ethic of social awareness in our students, took a number of forms this year. We painted old furniture from local schools and the community center in El Rosario. Then, students collected beautiful plants around streams in the village and used them to make a garden at the community center. Finally, we spent a day at the elementary school in San José, a neighboring village. We painted one of the walls (that had been left unfinished from a previous paint job), painted the school furniture, picked up trash, weeded the front lawn, and created a small garden. The schoolteacher in San José has been out of town grieving the unfortunate loss of her son; we hope she will be pleased to return to this surprise beautification arranged by the Fuerza students. Finally, students in Juliana’s group created a large world map. That exciting process is described below.



### World Map Project, Juliana Ortego

My group of just six students spent the week drawing and painting by hand a 14' x 7' world map on the wall of the community's education center. When I first told my students what our project would be they shook their heads and told me there was no way they would be able to complete such a detailed project. By the end of the first day they had drawn freehand over half of the countries in the world. At the end of the week, the map was complete and they were so proud of what they had accomplished that they approached me asking if they could sign their names on the map. This was the first time any of them had ever studied a world map. The questions they asked sparked impromptu history lessons throughout the day as we worked. Some of my favorites were: *Why is Alaska part of the United States when you have to travel all the way across Canada to get there? Why are there two Koreas? What is the Panama Canal?* The group also learned about WWII for the first time. Each student received a packet of information to read about a particular country and presented the information they learned to their peers. The students excitedly revealed the map to the community during the Fuerza graduation ceremony.



### Creative Reading / Writing and Public Health, Christine Averill



This year, I wanted to intellectually push my group in a way I had not previously tried. I brought in a few short stories by some Spanish literary masters, which we read and discussed as a group each day. My students were particularly challenged by the story "El Otro," by Jorge Luis Borges. The story presented a complicated exploration of personal identity. My group dissected the events and dialogue of each page, and discussed how the characters' opinions and tones changed throughout the story's progression. I then encouraged them to write creative expressions of their own by giving them writing prompts about their personal opinions and identities. Another

short story we read, "Nosotros, No" by Jose A. Adolph, sparked a very fruitful discussion of healthcare developments and general technological advances that my students had seen in their villages over their lifetimes. My students used creative energy garnered from that discussion to interview Sue (a Physician's Assistant who frequently joins us on trips in order to work with the local nurse at the El

Rosario clinic) about health topics that interested them. These included diabetes, blood pressure, and dengue fever. My students collected data about disease symptoms and important follow-up steps from their talk with Sue and from medical books. Then, they wrote a number of pamphlets discussing those health topics, which they put on display in the El Rosario library to serve as public informational resources.

### Village Oral History Project, Keelin Stronski



My project was collecting some history about the town. The kids came up with the topics they were interested in learning more about, and the questions that they wanted answered. We took these questions, and walked around town stopping by the houses of various people who had lived in the community for many years. We learned about who founded the town, when formal education started, and how the town got water and electricity. We also learned about some of the social changes that have occurred over the years. The kids then compiled this information, and presented it during graduation. Although that was

our main project, we also did some work with reading and writing. We read the story “Borges y yo” by Jorge Luis Borges, discussed it, and wrote short creative pieces based on the story. We also had some discussions identifying what qualities make for good leadership, and how they can be good leaders in their community.

Mike Harris and Ian Speers greatly contributed to the success of the Fuerza program while also working on other projects with our parent organization, ACTS.



### Ian Speers

I had a great experience in Honduras, working with the ACTS medical team and with the Fuerza to help with development projects. With the medical team, I participated in outreach trips to patients with disabilities, collected DNA swabs for genetic studies, and assisted in the local clinic.

Development projects I participated in included assisting with making the world map, sanding and staining exam tables, and sanding and painting tables, desks, and chairs for the community center and the schools.

### Mike Harris

The trip went smoothly and it was productive and enjoyable with a very compatible group of people.

The highlights for me were the following:

-The purchase of a parcel of land in El Rosario in a lawyer's office despite comprehending very little of the legal process in Spanish

-My unwittingly providing the Fuerza boys with their greatest challenge of the week when I locked the truck with the keys inside. The boys excitedly rose to the challenge and found a way to open the truck with the clever use of a rebar and a stick.

-The unfolding of the map of the world which was drawn by Fuerza students on the wall of the Education Center. The finished product was explosively colorful and remarkably accurate, and it is a marvelous contribution to the village.



*Mike Harris '72, Ian Speers '17, Christine Averill '13, Juliana Ortego '13, Keelin Stronski '16*

Our trip was extremely successful and we were able to accomplish so much alongside the people of El Rosario. We sincerely thank you for your support for our project and the community of El Rosario. It means a great deal to receive such encouragement from friends, family and organizations that have enabled us to continue this important work.

Warmly,

Juliana Ortego and Christine Averill, on behalf of DASH, a chapter of ACTS